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MANAGING SELF-CONSCIOUS EMOTION IN BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT: A THEORETICALLY INFORMED META- SYNTHESIS

DAWN LEEING, JOYCE MARSHALL & SOPHIE HINSLIFF

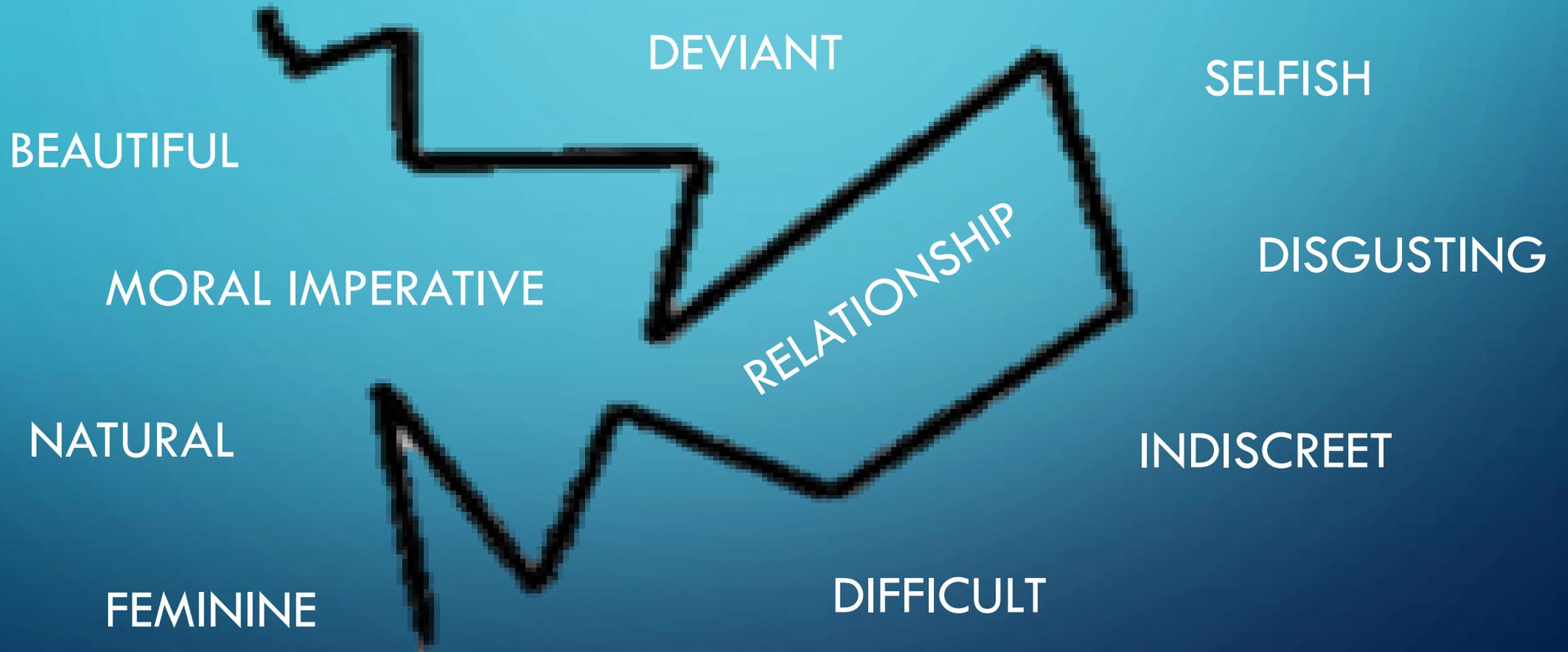
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SUPPORT FOR BREASTFEEDING

- Crucial for increasing rates of breastfeeding
- More is known about outcomes than processes (Leeming et al., 2017)

AIM: to explore the management of emotional processes by re-examining previous research on women's experiences of breastfeeding support

BREASTFEEDING IS CULTURALLY CONTESTED

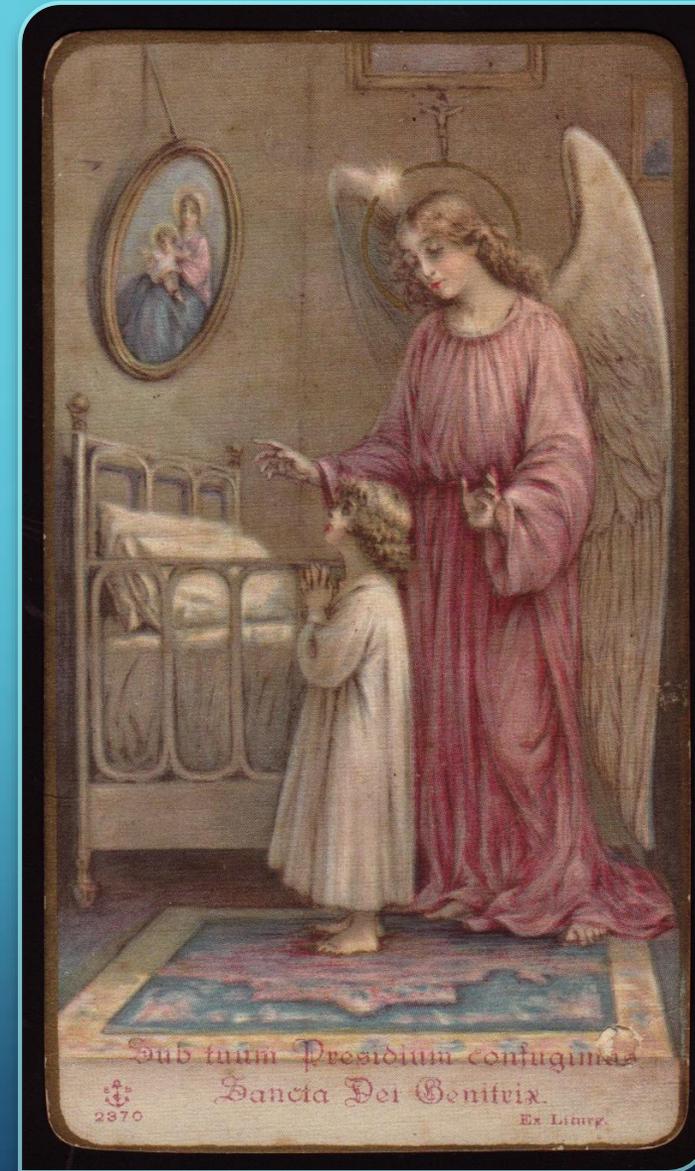


ACCESSING SUPPORT MAY HAVE COMPLEX MEANINGS?

- Am I successfully becoming a good mother?
- What kinds of women do / don't breastfeed?
- What will they think of me for.....?
- Is there something wrong with me?
- I should have... / I ought to...

NB Negative self-evaluation and perceived judgement may be an issue for some

(e.g: McInnes & Chambers, 2008; Ryan et al., 2010; Spencer et al., 2015; Thomson et al., 2015; Williamson et al., 2012)



SELF-CONSCIOUS EMOTION AS A USEFUL FRAMEWORK



- Experience of self-evaluation is not just cognitive: can invoke powerful feelings and bodily sensations
- **SHAME, GUILT, EMBARRASSMENT, HUMILIATION, PRIDE** – feelings when we evaluate ourselves & consider others' evaluations of us

SELF-CONSCIOUS EMOTIONS

PRIDE: Positive evaluation of self or behaviour / achievements

GUILT: Evaluation of behaviour as wrongdoing. Concern with hurting others & with reparation.

SHAME: Evaluation of *self* as bad. Sense of exposed bad self - unworthy of belonging. Others as critical / rejecting

EMBARRASSMENT: Others are evaluating our behaviour as foolish / out of place - a gaffe

HUMILIATION: Demeaned unfairly by others – rage

[See Brown, 2006; Gilbert, 2003; Sabini et al., 2001; Tracy & Robins, 2007; Lewis 1993; Tangney & Dearing, 2002]

SELF-CONSCIOUS EMOTION IS INTERPERSONAL

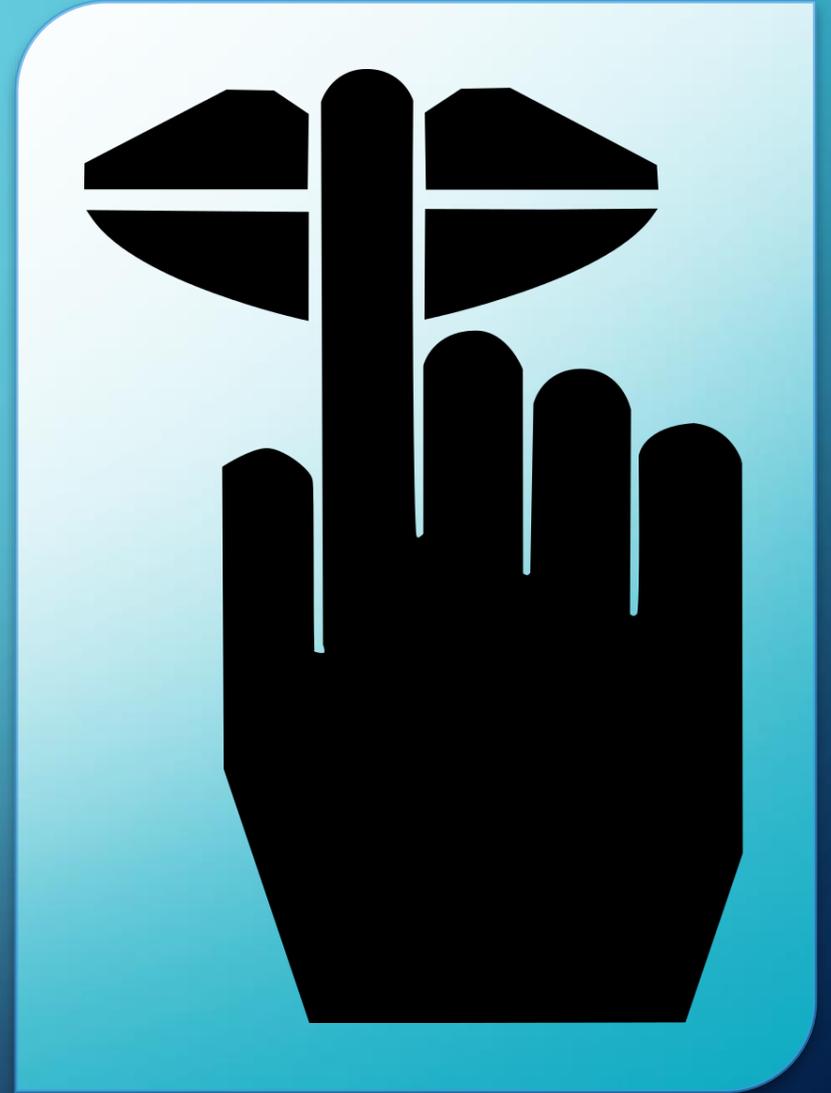
- Evaluating self-in-relation-to-others, with reference to common cultural understandings (Gilbert, 2003; Tracy & Robins, 2007; Scheff, 2003)
- Managed interpersonally - apology, forgiveness, empathy, withdrawal, attack, blame, laughing (Brown, 2006; Leeming & Boyle, 2013; van Vliet, 2008)

Therefore: SCE relevant to interactions around breastfeeding support

SELF-CONSCIOUS EMOTION IS OFTEN SILENT

Research on self-conscious emotion
and breastfeeding support is limited

e.g. Leeming, 2016; Taylor & Wallace 2012;
Thomson et al. 2015; Williams et al 2012;
Williamson et al. 2012; Woollard 2016



THEORETICALLY INFORMED META-SYNTHESIS

Re-examination of research on experiences of breastfeeding support using self-conscious emotion as a sensitising concept:

- Systematic search identified 29 UK papers 2007-2016 & quality confirmed
 - Varied forms of support: generic & specialist; professional and formal peer support; inpatient & community; telephone & face-to-face
 - Exploration of women's perspectives & experiences
 - Varied samples & contexts
- Template analysis (King & Brooks, 2017) of reported findings
- Informed by a broad conceptualisation of self-conscious emotion:
 - focus on 'self': self-evaluation & perceived treatment of / response to self

THREE KEY THEMES

- A precarious self
- The emotional 'work' of managing the infant-feeding-self
- Validation vs invalidation by breastfeeding supporters

A PRECARIOUS SELF (THROUGH A FRAGMENTED LOOKING GLASS)

*'My greatest
achievement'*

*'It doesn't look as
if you've got
enough milk'*

*'You have to
keep your
breast hidden'*

*'I just felt like a
complete failure'*

*'She said you
will be like a
cow'*

*'Maybe I'm being
selfish by not giving
her a bottle'*

'You are making a rod for your own back'

'An inferior mother'

'I should know what to do'

'Natural & right for me'

'I can do this for him'



EMOTIONAL WORK OF MANAGING INFANT-FEEDING-SELF

A sense of agency in managing a precarious self:

- Strategic seeking of connection / disconnection
- Selective adoption & adaptation of advice
- Impression management with breastfeeding supporters ('illusions of compliance' – *Spencer et al., 2015*; pretending to cope)
- Reconstructing identity in conversation (e.g. externalisation; justification; declaring guilt!; 'moral work' *Ryan et al 2010*)



VALIDATION

VS

INVALIDATION



MESSAGE RECEIVED:

I have confidence in you. I value you and your baby, and accept your choices and struggles as meaningful. Your feelings make sense.

MESSAGE RECEIVED:

You and your baby are unimportant to me. Your needs, choices and feelings are either of no concern, are inappropriate, or do not make sense.



CONCLUSIONS

- A 'focused synthesis' can be useful for attending to important aspects of experience?
 - Though doesn't synthesise the totality of experience
- Women are not simply engaging with support for breastfeeding – they are often managing conflicting identity claims
- Validation by supporters may need to be proactive – invalidation may be assumed by women and unspoken
- Could breastfeeding promotion & support be expanded to address self-conscious emotion more explicitly?



REFERENCES

Available from authors.

